With the Author Comps.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH

OF

BRADING,

IN THE

Isle of Wight,

ON FEBRUARY 27, 1799,

Being the Day appointed for a General Fast.

BY THE

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OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, CURATE OF THE PARISHES OF BRADING AND YAVERLAND, IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT, AND PERPETUAL CURATE OF CATON NEAR LANCASTER.

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TO THE

Inhabitants of the Parishes of

BRADING AND YAVERLAND,

IN THE

ISLE OF WIGHT,

THIS DISCOURSE IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY THE

AUTHOR.

HE has complied with their request in making it Public, from an humble hope that the principles, which it inculcates, may under the blessing of God, be in some degree instrumental to the promotion of Piety and Patriotism. The advancement of God's glory, and of man's truest happiness, is the only object which he has in view, and will, he sincerely trusts, plead the best apology for his imperfect endeavours in so exalted a cause.

A SERMON.

LUKE XIII. the latter part of the 3d verse.

"*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*"

THERE can be no employment of our reasoning faculties more worthy of the christian character than that of tracing the footsteps of eternal wisdom, as manifested in the various events which befall mankind, and from thence being led to adore that Providence, which, by setting before us the awful examples of divine vengeance towards other sinners, warns us to beware of a similar fate. It is with this intention that the sacred histories are handed down to us; they are committed to our trust, as the holy repositories of those solemn truths and momentous

records, which instruct as well by example as by precept, and in the lives, actions, and circumstances of others, teach us to read our own. Thus indeed all history, profane as well as sacred, reflects as in a mirror, our own virtues and vices, whilst we contemplate those of our fellow creatures; but, as disciples of the christian faith, we necessarily regard the scriptures in a more exalted point of view, as they deliver the word of God himself communicated by his holy spirit to mankind. It is this word, which being "* quick and "powerful, and sharper than any two-edged "sword," alternately utters the most dreadful denunciations of wrath against obstinate sinners, and the most soothing promises of pardon and peace to the returning penitent. It is by the word of God alone, that we can discover whence we are, and whither we are to look forward: by this, the wanderings of conjecture are guided, and the darkness, with which mere human intellects are enveloped, is effectually dissipated. Herein we more particularly trace the manifestations of God's superintending Providence in promoting the rise or fall of national prosperity, as connected with national virtue; and from hence are enabled to foresee, that public misery

* Heb: iv. 12.

misery and disgrace will be the inevitable consequence of a general depravity of morals, for " * righteousness exalteth a nation, but " the way of the ungodly shall perish."

We are also taught to look with anxious hope and fearful solicitude for the welfare of the church of Christ, which is on every side encompassed with most dangerous and inveterate adversaries: in an age, wherein such multitudes, like " † children, are tossed to " and fro, and carried about with every wind " of doctrine, by the slight of men and " cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in " wait to deceive," every one who knows the value of that blessed Gospel, which hath brought " life and immortality to light," must feel tremblingly alive to its interests. For although we are well assured that Christ's " ‡ church is built on a rock, and the gates " of hell shall not prevail against it," and that however, " § the sun of righteousness" may be partially obscured by clouds and tempests, it shall never be totally eclipsed; nevertheless, as we are fallen upon times, in which whole nations have become apostate from the faith, and even " within the walls

* Prov: xiv. 34. Ps: i. 6. † Eph: iv. 14.
‡ Matt: xvi. 18. § Mal: iv. 2.

" of our own cities," behold so many who " ‖ walk in the vanity of their mind, having " the understanding darkened, being alienat- " ed from the life of God," we have ample cause to dread, least that portion of the christian hemisphere, which it has so long been the glory and happiness of this country to occupy, should likewise be darkened, and the vindictive lightnings of divine wrath substituted for the mild and prolific beams of heavenly truth. Surrounding nations are daily sinking beneath the iron rod of republican tyranny and licentious infidelity; " § woe seems to be pronounced against the " inhabiters of the earth and the sea;"— " * now all these things have happened unto " us for ensamples;" but if we heed them not, if they do not operate as a powerful warning, excite every dormant principle of patriotism, and give new life to the languishing spirit of piety amongst us, where soon will be our rock of defence? to whom shall we look for protection in the day of trouble?

This day, my brethren, is by public authority consecrated to the purpose of a solemn and sincere humiliation before Almighty God, in order to deprecate his wrath, and

‖ Eph: iv. 18. 19. § Rev: xii. 12. * Cor: x. 11.

and avert (if it may so please him) those punishments, which the precepts of our holy faith but too justly denounce against that load of impiety with which the land is burthened: and I trust, you readily acknowledge it as a manifest and peculiar blessing, that whilst the religion of Christ "suffereth violence" in so many other kingdoms, we still live under a government, which has the piety to suggest, and the ability to ordain a season to be dedicated to national repentance and public confession of our sins. Though sacrilegious hands have been permitted to pull down the establishments of religion, and unhallowed feet have trampled upon the altars of God amongst "other nations which so furiously rage together;" the temples wherein *our* forefathers worshipped, are as yet protected by the arm of God; long may they continue thus to be upheld, but without the most strenuous exertions of piety and perseverance on our part, we must not indulge so vain an hope. If, like others, we persist in the practice of iniquity, and refuse to turn unto the Lord our God, we also must share in one common destruction; "except ye "repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The same Almighty Being which rained down fire upon Sodom and Gomorrha, which destroyed

stroyed the Egyptian hosts in the waters of the ocean, and entombed the rebellious associates of Korah in the caverns of the earth, still " ruleth in the kingdoms of men," and dispenses the righteous distributions of justice, with the same unerring wisdom as heretofore; and although for a while, through his long suffering and forbearance, the execution of the sentence against the wicked be delayed, yet the ungodly shall not go unpunished, but will sooner or later be convinced, that " * it is a " fearful thing to fall into the hands of the " living God."

It would be foreign to my present purpose to detain you with an account of the antiquity or propriety of solemnizing public fasts: it is sufficient to observe, that it is manifestly proved from the authority of the sacred historians and prophets, that from the earliest periods of time, the mortification and abasement of the body have been considered as natural and necessary marks § of contrition and religious sorrow; and although in itself the mere act of fasting can only be acceptable

* Heb: x. 31.

§ Lev: xxiii. 27. Josh: vii. 6. 1 Sam: vii. 6. 2 Sam: xii. 16. Jon: iii. 6, 7, 8. 2 Chron: xx. 3. Acts, xiii. 3. xiv. 23. 1 Cor: vii. 5. 2 Cor: vi. 5.

able to God in proportion as it is dictated by the genuine feelings of a repentant heart, yet from the manner in which our Saviour* makes mention of it, it ought to be ever held by all pious christians as a devout and salutary duty. We are not indeed to fast "as the hypocrites," who disguise their outward form only, "that they may appear to men to fast;" but our humiliation must be accompanied with the tribute of the heart, offered "unto the father which is in secret:" whether we assemble to return thanks for mercies conferred upon us, or with fastings and prayers to make confession of our sins; whether the service which we offer be in the public assembly of the people, or in the privacy of retirement, in every case must our devotion be worthy of that good master, who taught his disciples to "§ worship the father "in spirit and in truth."

My design is, to call your attention to the real existing state of national morals, and to point out to you, wherein we "have all "sinned and fallen short of the righteousness "of God," that you may be awakened to a sense of our danger, both as private individuals, and members of a political community.

* Matt: vi. 16. § John iv 23.

nity. The strongest argument to prove the urgent necessity of a speedy and radical reformation of morals and manners, arises from a comparison of what is, with what ought to be, and from a contemplation of the state of general virtue, as opposed to the doctrines and precepts of the christian gospel. For, however the popular sentiments of mankind may fluctuate, as well in religious as political concerns, the religion of Christ, like its author, is "* the same yesterday, and to-day, "and for ever." The features of piety and virtue, as delineated by the holy penmen of scripture, still retain their primitive and unchangeable resemblance to the divine image of God, and there is no other standard to which our conduct can conform with any rational or well-founded basis of hope: to the oracles of God therefore we must refer, and when "† we are weighed in the balances, "if we be found wanting," who shall be so presumptous as to conclude, that God, who "hath cast out others in the multitude of "of their transgressions, may not also have "numbered this kingdom, and speedily may "finish it." It neither can or ought to be concealed, that the prevalence of infidelity, and the relaxation of virtue and piety in every

* Heb. xiii. 8. † Dan: v. 26. 27.

every rank of society, daily increase amongst us: there is a general lukewarmness respecting religion, which threatens this country with a more hasty downfall than all the combined powers of our open enemies. If by our obedience and humble submission we rendered ourselves worthy of God's favor, we should have little occasion to " * be " afraid or dismayed by reason of this great " multitude" that is risen up against us; but the deceitfulness of our own hearts, and the gradual though sure operation of inward corruption, propagate an host of adversaries to our peace and prosperity, which must give the christian lover of his country serious and well-grounded alarm. But even lukewarmness is too favorable a term to be applied to the religious feelings of the great majority; absolute carelessness and barefaced contempt, towards things sacred, reign and prevail amongst us; how many are there whose conduct betrays a total inattention to every thing that wears even the aspect of piety and devotion; and how extensive the number of those " presumptuous " and self-willed" scoffers, who in these latter days are risen up, treating all that is holy with mockings and derision, and setting up their own vain bablings and proud ima-

* 2 Chon: xx. 15.

ginations against the revealed word of the most high God, and even against the repeated convictions of their own conscience. Throughout every rank of society have their destructive doctrines been gradually propagated; not only has the religion of Christ been vilified and misrepresented by the polished pens and subtle arguments of philosophers and historians, and thus under a mask of learning and candour, principles subversive of all true faith and piety have been insinuated into the minds of the higher classes of society; but of late also infidelity has set new engines to work, and its poisons have been retailed with unremitting industry amongst thousands of that rank of men, who from their ignorance are unable, and from the prevalence of corrupt passions, are unwilling to refute the blasphemous doctrines which are circulated amongst them; systems which tend to relax the obligations of religion, by flattering the natural pride of the human heart, and thus inevitably giving loose to the reins by which licentiousness is curbed, will ever find ready access into the minds of the multitude, who are unqualified to penetrate through the winning speciousness of their exterior, and happy by any means to shake off that yoke which requires

so much purity and practical holiness from all who submit to it. From a combination of these causes, has arisen such familiarity with sinful and forbidden pursuits, as to have methodized them into system, and melancholy as the observation is, so little is pure religion cultivated, that many of its most essential precepts are almost unknown to multitudes who so proudly boast of the enlightened state of the world. Enlightened it may be, by the glittering tapers which false philosophy holds up as the directors of our course; but never let us concede to the delusive reasoners of modern days, that the wisdom and experience of our forefathers is to be set at nought, or that they who shut their eyes against the light of heaven, can either prosper themselves, or lead others into the paths of prosperity. From this prevalent mixture of false doctrines, united to the neglect and perversion of the true, proceeds much of that careless indifference as to the future state of the soul, which is so observable in these days.

The natural and necessary consequence of this indifference towards "the life that is to "come," is, that sins of the most atrocious description not only more and more abound,

but are treated with levity, and looked upon without disgust. There is an easy gradation which vice makes in its progress through the human heart: at first, though its allurements please and captivate, yet through a conscious sense of guilt, we strive to conceal it; till at length it becomes habitual, and then presumption dares to justify it.

A slight review of some of the prevalent vices and impieties with which the national character is disgraced, must force conviction upon the heart, that although we are a nation, highly and indeed beyond all example favored by every exterior blessing of Providence, yet are we deficient in "the "inner man:" our piety bears little proportion to our prosperity.

Witness the fondness for strong liquors, and the frequency of the consequent sin of drunkenness in all its gradations, so prevalent throughout every rank of individuals; who can behold without a mixture of pity and indignation, the thousands of our fellow countrymen who are daily bartering their very souls for the sensual gratifications of strong liquors, and forfeiting the noblest privileges of man for the base satisfaction of

of being converted into brutes. Although this crime invariably leads to the commission of every species of vice and debauchery, yet is it countenanced and encouraged, by the great and the wealthy, the old and the young of every denomination, from the peer of the realm, to the humblest tiller of the ground. It is a vice, to the cherishing of which, the powers of argument, temptation, and ridicule are all in turn employed ; its baneful effects are but laughed at as a source of harmless merriment, and instead of being held up to public scorn and reprehension, they who "§ are mighty to drink wine, and men of "strength to mingle strong drink," though "they justify the wicked, and take away "the righteousness of the righteous from "him," are but too generally held up to the young and inexperienced, as models for imitation.

* The practice of this odious crime, (for

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§ Is: v. 22, 23.

* I was perhaps induced to make so early mention of drunkenness, considered in a public view from having had occasion to lament the frequency of it in my own neighbourhood: but I am well convinced, that in every part of the kingdom, the prevalence of inebriety calls aloud for reformation, as it in no small degree contributes to that corrupt carelessness of religious duties, and open profession of impiety, which in these days is so earnestly to be deplored. How much it is to be wished, that many of those who have so laudably and honorably associated themselves for the protection of their country against its unprin-

I cannot in compliance with wordly sentiments and fashions give it a softer appellation) tends to the speedy demolition of all religion, not only by promoting the most violent irruptions of sin into the heart, but by wholly incapacitating the mind from the exercise of virtue. When reason has deserted her station, every bar to iniquity is broken, every bond of decency and moderation is dissolved. Whoever examines into the present state of morals, both of the higher and lower classes in this country, will easily perceive what an accumulated mass of depravity takes its origin from the habitual indulgence in strong liquors.—However disguised and palliated under the various pleas of custom, friendly intercourse and harmless conviviality, still does the crime of drunkenness with all its attendant train of corruption and iniquity, largely abound to the opprobrium of our national morality. To those who know how to estimate truly the progress of vice, and to view it, not through the medium of flattering prejudices,

cipled foe, were sufficiently aware how essentially they have it in their power (under the blessing of God) to promote the prosperity of the nation, by *also* associating in the practical support of that religion which they are sworn to defend. Let them remember that our welfare depends at *least* as much upon SOBRIETY of manners, and the cultivation of the Christian character, as on personal valour and the ardour of political zeal.

prejudices, but by the light of sober unadulterated truth, it must ever be a source of just lamentation and alarm, to reflect upon the numerous tribes of those who "* rise up "early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until "night, till wine inflame them: and the "harp and the viol, the tabret and the pipe, "and wine are in their feasts: but they "regard not the work of the Lord, neither "consider the operation of his hands."— At such revels it is that the rising youth are too frequently initiated in the mysteries of vice, and instead of imbibing the maxims of piety and virtue from the society of the world, they become early victims of passion, and disciples of a system, known by the false title of honor; a system which in the language of the Prophet, teaches to "‖ call "evil good, and good evil, that puts darkness for light, and light for darkness."

HIGH ranked among these stands the duellist; and although his offence be a monstrous compound of assassination and self-murder, yet in these days of encreasing depravity of morals, it is considered as a mark

* Is: v. 11. 12.

‖ Is: v. 20.

mark of ignominy and disgrace not to resent an injury, however trivial, even unto blood, and to be prepared on all occasions, to unite the character of a murderer to that of suicide. Can there be a greater proof that we fear men rather than God, when we thus openly apostatize from the first principles of religion, in conformity to the customs of the world? If such sanguinary doctrines prevail to so great an extent, that few men of the higher orders of society at least can be found to disclaim them, is it not ample testimony that religion is known only by *name*, to a large multitude of those, who from their rank and situation ought to be the patterns of virtue and piety?

I consider it as altogether unnecessary to enter into any proof of the heinousness of this crime; it is the frequency * of it which I now adduce as a conclusive testimony of the reduced state of general morals. The statutes of christian morality enjoin to † "love even "your

* It may be instanced as a proof of the melancholy prevalence of such principles and practice, that no less than four cases of Clergymen being concerned in duels, have appeared in the public prints within the space of the last year. A most excellent reproof was lately delivered from the bench to one of these offenders by Mr. Justice Grose, whose sentiments on the occasion did equal honor to the feelings of the Christian, the Judge, and the Man.

† Matt: v. 44. vi. 15.

"enemies, to bless them that curse you, to "do good to them that hate you, and pray "for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you": for "if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours". Compare these precepts with the sentiments which custom sanctions amongst us, and say whether they can be deemed to be a pious, or a moral people, who thus wilfully sacrifice their virtue to maintain reputation, and for the slightest injury will murder a friend, rather than make an unprincipled world their enemy.

In thus lamenting the progress of corruption in our national morals, humanity and justice alike forbid me to pass over in silence the innumerable wrongs and miseries of that sex, whose virtue and happiness are so continually, so iniquitously sacrificed at the altar of licentiousness by the basest arts of hypocrisy and deceit. The increasing frequency of female seduction with all its attendant train of depravity and wretchedness throughout every rank of society, gives but too ample evidence of the declension of religious principle. It is foreign to my present design to enumerate each particular evil which traces its origin to the licentious customs

of the times; nor shall I attempt to pursue the profligate corrupter of innocence to the haunts of dissipation and vice, and lay open his accumulated guilt to public indignation and shame. Any recital which I could give of the woes entailed upon its victims by the prevalence of this sin amongst us, would be altogether inadequate to the purpose: far more impossible would it be to express how "great an abomination it must "be in his sight, who is of * purer eyes than "to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity". Let the ruin of domestic peace, the ravages of untimely disease, the multiplied wretchedness of fallen virtue, and the consequent dissoluteness of morals so invariably produced by the prevalence of such transgressions, let these speak in language more powerful than that of words, how far "we are fallen from the righteousness of "God".

You cannot be ignorant how numerous are the instances of female seduction, particularly amongst the lower classes of the community in your own neighbourhood, nor can it have escaped the observation of many, how much the standard of virtue and decency is lowered by the frequency of such licentious

* Habak. i. 13.

licentious conduct: but the greater part of you are happily removed from those scenes of more refined voluptuousness and iniquity which disgrace the manners of the wealthier votaries of pleasure. † I lay the greater stress upon this symptom of decay in public morals, because the history of almost every age and country testifies that the great prevalence of sins of this description, has uniformly preceded the downfall of states.

WHENEVER the Jewish nation forsook their God and gave themselves up to the impious idolatries of their heathen neighbours, the unrestrained indulgence of libidinous passions was a distinguishing characteristic of

 their

† To those whose principles are not so far degraded as to look upon corruption of morals, as a matter of trifling concern, it must appear a melancholy consideration that in many (I fear in most) parts of the kingdom, few marriages, comparatively speaking, take place amongst the lower classes of the community, wherein the female has not been the previous victim of seduction In the higher orders, profligacy has long been complained of, and their example has of late done much towards the advancement of corruption in the middle classes of our countrymen. The records of the Court of King's Bench and Doctor's Commons, almost daily exhibit fresh proofs of the increasing and alarming prevalence of adultery, seduction and licentiousness. The very levity with which these subjects are commonly treated, is the natural consequence of that spirit of libertinism which is so widely diffused over the land, and it is no small proof of deep-rooted and general relaxation of virtue, that crimes of so pernicious a tendency can be mentioned with indifference, or heard of without indignant reprobation.

their apostacy. The awful visitations of God upon that "adulterous and sinful" people are well known; may no Babylonish captivity, or what in our own days is equally to be dreaded, no subjection to the tyranny of infidel France, become the just punishment of *our* national licentiousness! It ought to be remarked, that in the greater part of those countries which have so lately been subjugated to the power of this universal and destructive enemy, no feature of public depravity has been more observable, than that of infidelity in marriage, and the unbridled gratification of lustful appetites: "*Suppose "ye that these Galileans were sinners above "all the Galileans, because they suffered such "things? I tell you, nay; but except ye re- "pent, ye shall all likewise perish". It is not for us to set limits to the divine vengeance against sinners, or to rely upon the forbearance of God, because we may imagine others to have "transgressed more sorely than we": the burthen of *our own* sins is already abundantly great, and without speedy and radical reformation, must daily become greater. Vice by indulgence and habit gains strength, as a falling stone acquires rapidity and force by its descent.

Another

* Luke xiii. 2, 3.

. ANOTHER instance of the decay of religious principles in the nation may be deduced from the melancholy frequency of self-murder, the commission of which crime has of late years increased to an alarming extent: If there be a testimony more especially declarative of a total want of trust in God and of faith in his holy word and promises, he is the bearer of it, who with respect to the evils of this world is so wretched a coward, that he dare not face them, yet has the presumption to rush into the perils of the world that is to come, with all his sins unrepented of, and for ever deprived of the possibility of repentance. The notorious increase of this dreadful offence manifests too plainly the prevalence of unbelief and mistrust in God. It is not *thus* we were taught to " † run with patience the race that is set before us".*

WHERE

† Heb. xii. 1.

It is scarcely necessary to remark that in all cases of previous derangement and madness, these observations are not intended to apply: whether the unhappy lunatic become the destroyer of himself or of others, he is equally the object of unaffected pity, and compassionate concern; unfeeling indeed must be that heart, which could wilfully add to the burthen of such affliction, by passing sentence of judgment on *his* actions. But whoever has minutely examined this melancholy subject, will find that the frequency of suicide has kept regular pace with the progress of irreligion and vice: hence I am of opinion, that acts of self-murder are too indiscriminately attributed to the influence

WERE any additional proof wanting to indicate the decline of piety and obedience to the will of God, it would be amply found in the careless observance and barefaced profanations of the Lord's day. It is unnecessary that I should now enlarge upon this subject, more especially as the experience of every sabbath testifies to you in the most unequivocal terms, how generally the pleasures and pursuits of a sinful world predominate in our hearts, and engross our best affections, to the exclusion of every spiritual concern

of insanity; there is much reason to fear, they are often the effect of more steady and desperate resolutions. When religious belief has lost its ascendancy over the human mind, whether through the habitual indulgence of vicious passions, or the cooler and more deliberate efforts of philosophical pride, it generally becomes hardened and indifferent to the prospects of eternity: some are so thoroughly depraved by *sensuality*, as to be totally careless about the existence and nature of a future state; others persuade themselves into a most groundless expectation of unqualified mercy and pardon without either atonement or repentance; and we have lately seen another description of men, boldly professing to believe that "death is eternal sleep." When such monstrous and dangerous opinions are afloat, it cannot excite our surprize, that under the pressure of extreme vexation or disappointment, suicide should often be resorted to, as "a present help in time of trouble," and a termination of that misery which is believed *only* to exist on this side the grave. They who are utter strangers to the divine consolations which the religion of Christ administers to human affliction and distress, are seldom prepared to stand the trial of adversity and mortification, hence they readily yield to the first impulse of despair. The prevailing existence of sensuality on one hand, and the general tendency of modern sceptical tenets on the other, will fully account for the increasing frequency of this deplorable crime, in our own as well as in other countries.

cern and the obstruction of all religious improvement.‡ There are so many good principles which combine to influence mankind to a due and willing observation of a day exclusively appropriated to works of piety, devotion and charity, that when we find not one of them to be sufficiently strong to inforce obedience, it is evident at how low an ebb religion must be, where the heart is unaffected by them; and when experience testifies how large a multitude of such irreligious dispositions exist in the country, we are forcibly compelled to acknowledge, that, as a nation, "we have rebelled against the Lord our God, and our hearts are hardened against him". Though he is gracious * and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness", yet we overlook his mercies, are ungrateful for his providential interference in our behalf, and lay a presumptuous claim to his protection, as an inherent right, rather than consider it as an unmerited

‡ To the growth of this, as well as of many other evils amongst the lower classes, the establishment of Sunday Schools offers a most salutary check. Where these institutions flourish under the diligent inspection (as well as patronage of) *those*, to whom on account of superior rank or fortune, the poor naturally look up for a good example, great and solid benefits have arisen: but in many parishes they are much neglected, and in many others are wholly unknown.

* Joel ii. 13.

unmerited blessing. True gratitude is manifested by obedience; "† this is love, that we walk after his commandments": if therefore the people do not shew themselves "zealous of good works", in proportion as his tender mercies are great, our sins assume a darker hue, and the burthen of them is increased by the number of our deliverances.

It is the necessary effect of a want of piety and the prevalence of sensuality to bring on a general carelessness, not only towards things eternal, but even with respect to many of the most essential things of a temporal nature. If men find they can go on from day to day in pusuit of pleasure and the acquirements of profit without any material interruption, they care for little else besides: the approach of national evils claims a small share of their regard and the increase of public depravity is unheeded. So as the narrow sphere of each man's domestic enjoyments and occupations be not immediately affected by them, the most important events which daily take place around us are either overlooked, or quickly forgotten: luxury, gaiety and dissipation gradually benumb the faculties

† 2 John 6.

faculties of the soul, and cast a "darkness, "even darkness * which may be felt," over the heart's noblest affections.

An habitual and general unwillingness to conform to a religious course of life becomes the parent of extreme spiritual ignorance: Worldly knowlege and mere speculative science are substituted in the room of that wisdom † which "cometh from above." Of this the crafty and delusive *reasoners* take advantage and perſuade their pupils into the belief of any thing which flatters their pride, cherishes their habits of sinful indulgence and relaxes the bonds of virtue and religion. Hence society becomes filled with free-thinkers as well as evil doers: when men find they cannot make their lives conformable to the restrictions of Christianity, they resolve to make religion accommodate itself to their enjoyments and habits of life: by this means they build up a fallacious system of morals, perfectly well suited to the votaries of worldly pleasure, but wholly inimical to the pure doctrines of the Gospel, and the advancement of Christ's kingdom. Men dread the truth, and therefore flatter themselves into the belief of falsehood.

* Exod. x. 21,

† James iii. 15.

FROM such loose principles nothing can be expected, but a general prevalence of corruption: vice, disguised in a thousand shapes, pervades the inmost recesses of the community, and with an outward appearance of stability and strength, there is a worm preying upon its vitals, which must inevitably bring on the dissolution of its prosperity, unless we "cry mightily unto the Lord and "turn every one from his evil way, and from "the violence * that is in our hands." The sword of vengeance red with the blood and streaming with the tears of those whom God in his displeasure hath submitted to its horrors, is still uplifted, and may only wait for the effect of this very day's humiliation to be directed in the blow which it is preparing to strike. "Wherefore † let him that think-"eth he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Let us not too presumptuously conclude because we have hitherto been a nation distinguished by the bounties of Providence, that God in his righteous judgments, will not subject *us* also to that fate which sooner or later must await iniquity resolutely persevered in. Unless we turn with faithful and penitent hearts to the Lord, shall *we* expect to be spared, whilst other sinners are subjected

* Jon. iii. 8.

† 1 Cor. x. 12.

subjected to punishment? Shall the blessings of the Almighty serve only to harden our hearts against him, instead of melting them into that "godly sorrow" for the sins of the people "which worketh repentance * to salvation"? Let us no longer boast of the security of our laws, liberties and persons, whilst we suffer their only pillar of permanent support to moulder and crumble away. When we least expect it the foundation of our vain hopes may be shaken. The avenging blow will be the more dreadful, but not the less certain, from its being unlooked for.

SACRED history describes in simple and impressive language the busy, careless state of a sinful people regardless of the warnings of religion and suddenly overtaken by the justice of an offended God. In the days of Noah and likewise of Lot, "they did eat, "* they drank, they married wives, they "were given in marriage, they bought, they "sold, they planted, they builded;" but by an awful visitation of God, the flood came in one instance, and in the other the Lord "rained fire and brimstone from heaven and "destroyed them all." Such also was the

* 2 Cor. vii. 10.

† Luke xvii. 26,—29.

admonition given to the Jews by our blessed Saviour, they were not to imagine that the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, or the eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem, but those things "happened to them" as warnings and examples to excite them to virtue and obedience. It is perfectly consistent both to reason and the tenor of the sacred writings that we should look upon the awful events which are now daily occurring, in precisely the same point of view; and if, like the Jews of old, you do not profit by such solemn admonitions, it is *our* duty, as ministers of God's word, faithfully to declare to you, that such ingratitude and want of confidence towards God must subject the nation to his heaviest displeasure and draw down the severest denunciations of his anger upon their heads: "except ye "repent ye shall all likewise perish."

I have dwelt thus largely on the extent of that spirit of "ungodliness, * the overflow-"ings of which have made me afraid" for the welfare of the kingdom, because conviction of sin must necessarily precede repentance: and the prevailing relaxation of religious

* Pſalm xviii. 4.

religious principles contributes no little to counteract the sincerity of contrition by magnifying imaginary merits and lessening our aversion to those sinful habits which are deplorably characteristic of the times. It is therefore abundantly requisite that truth be ingenuously declared, and "the righteousness of God," resolutely opposed to the impiety of man; it is by the doctrines of our heavenly Master alone, that we can hope to eradicate that "earthly, sensual † wisdom," which bids fair to cloud the light of truth and to undermine the foundations of christian peace and life.

It is by such reflections as I have suggested to you, that we must be awakened to a just sense of the danger which threatens us; a day like this, should not be consumed in the mere exterior worship of the body, without some step being taken towards that inward change of heart and renovation of manners, whereby alone the torrents of irreligion can be stemmed. For this end we must not content ourselves with making general observations upon the sins of the nation at large, but examine how far we share in them personally, and what means we must each

† Jam. iii. 15.

each individually pursue in order to promote the essential work of moral and religious reform.

It is evident, since the whole nation is composed of a number of individual families, that the moral character of the country at large must be regulated by that of the domestic circles whereof it consists. The first and most natural advance towards national improvement ought to be made by the reformation of each lesser society and the individuals which compose it. It is to little purpose that we inveigh against the wickedness of the country, and shudder at the perils with which it is threatened, unless we commence the great work of repentance at home, and humbly seek the blessing of God upon our efforts to contribute to the salvation of our country by our own personal attention to the weighty duties of the christian character. It is by individually striving to the utmost of our ability to promote the glory of God, that we must found our hopes of being preserved from that waste and desolation which menaces the very existence of civil society. Let it be strongly impressed upon the heart of every man, who, as the master of a family, is in a great

great degree responsible for the principles of those under his immediate care, that to *him*, his God and his country look for a promoter of piety, and a pattern of christian humility and obedience. "As for me * and "my house, we will serve the Lord," ought to be the firm resolution of every individual, who, like the brave and pious Joshua, is entrusted with the superintendance of an household. Let him strongly and devoutly urge it upon the minds of his children and dependants, that both he and they have interests in another world to consult as well as in this; that the present welfare of themselves and the country is at stake upon their conduct; and that without the sincere profession of the christian faith, shining forth in the unwearied exercise of its virtues, prosperity can never be looked for either in this world or in the next. In proportion as he feels convinced of the alarming exigencies of the times, let him struggle to break through the spiritual insensibility of his heart, from a steady persuasion that our deliverance must be sought not only in the vigilant exertions of the body, but in the liveliest energies of the soul. With this view let him promote the constant and pious study

* Josh. xxiv. 15.

study of God's word in his family, ever impressing it upon their hearts, that religion is not only, "the one * thing needful," but also the one thing most delightful; that they who cultivate it with a right spirit, will invariably find, "her * ways are ways "of pleasantness and all her paths are peace."

WITHOUT a solid foundation laid in the exercise of pure piety, no efficacious reform must be expected: it is this only which can oppose the deep-rooted existence of "inor-"dinate ‡ affection, evil concupiscence, and "covetousness ‖, for which thing's sake, the "wrath of God cometh on the children of "disobedience."

* Luke x. 42. † Prov. iii. 17

‡ Col. iii. 5 & 6.

‖ There can be no principle more decidedly hostile to the progress of pure religion in the heart than the love of money and eager thirst for amassing riches: yet so univerally prevalent is this passion and so deliberately systematized amongst us, that by the conversation and conduct of every rank of individuals from the peer to the peasant, it should seem, as if they thought that the whole purpose of their creation and the very end of their existence were completely answered in the attaining a comfortable establishment in this world. The spirit I apprehend is much on the increase and presents a formidable obstacle to the advancement of piety and religion. "Covetousness, says the Apostle, is idolatry"; (Col. iii. 6.) and there is much reason to conclude from external appearance, that no idol of antiquity ever received more sincere and devout homage, than is *now* paid to the golden images before which multitudes of our own countrymen bow down and worship.

"disobedience." However hostile it may be to our nature and habits, we must learn to be less absorbed in the perishable concerns of this world, and to fix our hopes more permanently on the attainment of a better. The radical reformation, which is so loudly called for must commence in the human heart; till religion has established her throne *there*, all declamation against the depravity of the age, and all schemes of moral amendment will be fruitless and unprofitable. Much of what we have been so industriously taught by the preceptors of profligacy and fashion must be *unlearned* again and extirpated from the heart: many an evil passion, which we have fondly indulged, must be mortified and vanquished; and those frivolous pursuits and dissipated pleasures which corrupt the heart and poison the fountains of life must be rejected and despised, before we can hope to present ourselves and our services as "an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord." If as individuals, we commence this reform, with the gracious assistance and blessing of God, it cannot be long before the joyful fruits shall appear in the renewal of national morals; the anger of an offended Deity may thus be turned from us and his divine favor restored. We must

consider not only how essential it is to our own immortal prospects that we should repent and reform, but how materially it will promote the happiness of those who are most near and dear to us, as well as of the country at large. As an impression upon the surface of the water, first creates a small circle, which gradually produces others around it increasing in distance and magnitude; so each man's pious example will make a visible impression first upon the confined circle of his own immediate connections and thence be successively forwarded to the gradual but effective amendment of the whole community.

The mass of iniquity to be removed is incalculably great, and no man, once awakened to the perils of our situation, can be possessed either of love for his country, or gratitude to his Maker, if he will not struggle to diminish the burthen. The blessings and manifestations of divine interposition which God has hitherto showered down upon us with so bountiful an hand, serve only to magnify our sins, unless we testify our thankfulness by obedience to his will: "there is mercy with thee, THEREFORE * shalt thou be feared." It is from *this* consideration

* Pſalm cxxx. 4.

tion that the most powerful argument for a speedy reform is to be drawn; whilst yet in the days of our prosperity, we must seek the Lord, least when the time of adversity shall arrive, he hearken no longer to our supplication. The deadly scourge of war lashes the inhabitants of the earth with undiminished fury, and with God only it rests to determine within what limits its horrors shall be restrained. I should ill discharge the duties of that sacred relation in which I stand connected to you, were I to rest contented with barely exciting you to personal courage and mere bodily exertion in support of the sacred cause wherein we are engaged: at the same time it is a cordial satisfaction to witness how chearfully those qualities have lately been drawn forth in defence of the civil and religious establishments which we have received from our forefathers, and still know how to value and to venerate as well through gratitude to *their* memory, as from a natural regard to our own peace and prosperity. But whilst our hands are diligently employed in defence of the outward fabric of religion, I wish to see the heart equally active in cherishing that inward holy flame, without which, the other is but as a

shadow, and "an image * that is profitable "for nothing". We must not vainly talk of rising up to protect the cause of religion and order, whilst our lives and behaviour betray the insincerity of the professson. Religion can only be upheld by the cultivation of its doctrines and precepts. If therefore you would defend yourselves and the nation from the evils that impend, beware how you feel satisfied with using mere human weapons of protection: "there † is "no king saved by the multitude of an host: "a mighty man is not delivered by much "strength: but behold, the eye of the Lord "is upon them that fear him, upon them "that hope in his mercy." Seek then to oppose the current of vice, and corruption by cloathing your hearts with inward purity and holiness; this is that "armour of light," by which only we can obtain strength to stand in the evil day. "Be sober; ‡ be vigilant," for adversaries of every description, both spiritual and bodily, "walk "about seeking whom they may devour"; to resist these, we must "be ‖ strong in the "Lord, and the power of his might." Many § there are who "by good words and "fair

* Is. xliv. 10. † Psal. xxxiii. 16,—18. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 8.
‖ Eph. vi. 10. § Rom. xvi. 18.

" fair speeches deceive the hearts of the " simple," insinuating the most poisonous doctrines into the minds of the ignorant and unsuspecting under the specious mask of friendship and liberality*. Others, with unblushing confidence, " walk after the " flesh † in the lust of uncleanness, and de- " spise government," and speak evil of all things sacred, " denying the Lord that " bought them."

AGAINST

* In the present age we read and hear much of liberality of sentiment in matters of religion and politics, it is therefore of consequence that we should form just notions of a subject perhaps oftener talked of than understood. Genuine liberality of principle is what all must love, honor and cherish, except the contracted mind of the bigot or the sanguinary disposition of the persecutor; to the due exercise of liberality, in humble dependance on the will of God, we owe every blessing both civil and religious, which has so long characterized the prosperity of this country. But when under the plea of candor and liberality, licence is demanded for the assiduous propagation of principles subversive of religion and virtue; when the purity of christian belief is corrupted, and the only barrier which is able to check the progress of profligacy and vice, overthrown; when conspiracies against the peace and happiness of mankind are fostered, and unprincipled men claim a right to circulate pernicious opinions on matters of infinite importance: when all this is to be tolerated without control under pretence of liberality, it is high time to look with suspicious eye upon such a principle, to sift it thoroughly and to exhibit its true colors. We shall soon discover that it is a " presumptuous, self-willed" licentiousness, which veils itself under the delusive title of liberality; a licentiousness which seeks to propagate vice and irreligion with sedulous assiduity, leads to the profession of absolute scepticism and terminates in the total annihilation of every religious principle in the heart: it is the effects of such misnamed

† 2 Pet. ii. 10.

AGAINST such enemies to our peace, we must maintain an active and spiritual contest, for this "is the hour * of temptation, "which is come upon all the world to try "them that dwell upon the face of the "earth": let us look well to ourselves therefore, least we prove unable to stand "the fiery trial." We know not to what extremities of fate we may be reserved; but but this we do know that, "there is no "peace † to the wicked," neither "hope of "salvation

liberality, that have so lately deluged the plains of Europe with blood, and filled its cities with mourning and lamentation; by its fruits let it be known; it evidently declares itself to be the offspring of that "philosophy and vain deceit, whereof the Apostle commands us to "beware, as being after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of "the world and not after Christ." (Col: ii. 8)—Far be it from me to depreciate the value of true philosophy or pure liberality of sentiment, but it is the sacred duty of a christian pastor in these dangerous times, to warn his flock, that many are "the ravening wolves who "wander about for prey in sheep's cloathing"; wherefore they must not "believe *every* spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, "because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (1 John iv. 1.) It is of the first consequence that we enable ourselves and others to distinguish that false philosophy which "descendeth "not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish, from the divine wis-"dom which is pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, "full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without "hypocrisy." (Jam: iii. 15. 17.) The philosophy of the christian teaches him to lay the foundation of his *liberality* in an humble spirit and zeal for the glory of God; and *his* system of politics makes the truest liberty to consist in obeying Him, whose service is perfect freedom.

* Rev. iii 10. † Is. xlviii. 22.

"salvation to them that forget the Lord "their God." May this awful truth be engraven on our hearts in characters so deeply impressed, as no circumstance of time or fortune may be able to obliterate: the application of it is not restrained to age, sex or condition: we have each and all of us, a solemn call from on high zealously to labour in our respective vocations, so as to contribute to the preservation of our country. But if through the prevailing influence of infidelity and corruption, the same sad fate should await us, which has given a death-blow to the peace and happiness of millions of our fellow-creatures: if we should live to see the religion, the government, and the liberties of this nation also overthrown; what a bitter sigh of recollection must we heave over its ruins! How severely will the pangs of remorse be excited, from reflecting that our own transgressions have contributed to the downfall of our country's prosperity!

It is time therefore to cry out with Moses, "who is on the *Lord's side"? If this kingdom is to be rescued from the perils of that revolutionary vortex, into which the principles of impiety and licentiousness have seduced

* Exod. xxxii. 26.

seduced so many to their destruction, Religion must be the guardian of our peace, our only "refuge and strength" against the troubles of these eventful times. Protected by her, "we will not fear, * though the "earth be removed, and the mountains be "carried into the midst of the sea"; but "*except* the Lord † keep the city, the watch-"man waketh but in vain"; though our walls were of brass and our spears of adamant, they could afford us no means of ‡defence; the ingenuity, courage and activity of man are unavailing, except the grace and blessing of God prosper the work of his hands.

Convinced

* Psal. xlvi. 2. † Psal. cxxvii. 2.

‡ It is not so much by arms as by arts that our enemies, both foreign and domestic, seek our destruction. We must therefore beware how we place our only confidence in outward means of defence, whilst we overlook or neglect those internal supports, without which every other will be unavailing. The *exterior* circumstances of our warfare may alternately wear a prosperous or unfavorable aspect, as the overruling hand of Providence shall think fit to ordain, and mere worldly politicians may frame their speculations accordingly: but it must appear manifest to the religious spectator of the times, that no successes can be permanently advantageous; no exertions crowned with lasting triumph, unless the corruptions of luxury, extravagance and dissipation be firmly and speedily repressed. It is happily true that there is much cause to rejoice, when we compare our own condition with that of every other nation upon earth. An excellent and determined spirit has been infused into the hearts of Britons, which, under Providence, has been the means of protecting us from the worst of evils. But this very superiority both of moral and po-

Convinced of this momentous truth, that our "salvation", both temporal and eternal, must be "worked out with * fear and trembling," let us earnestly pray to God that this day of humiliation may lay the basis of that heavenly hope in our hearts, which springs from a pure and uncorrupted faith, and testifies the divinity of its origin by the unwearied exercise of christian charity.

May

* Phil. ii. 12.

litical condition affords the strongest argument, why we should labor to preserve and protect it from the inroads of vice and disorder; when therefore mingled with so much laudable zeal in a good cause, we nevertheless see debauchery and intemperance, profligacy of sentiment and behaviour, neglect of piety, and not unfrequently the avowed profession of infidelity; when these many-headed monsters are rapidly growing up amongst us, there is cause to tremble as well as to rejoice. Though there be much to admire, there is also much to be feared. It is to this consideration that I would draw the most serious attention of every class of my readers, and warn them of those perils, which though silent and unseen in their attack, are dreadfully efficient in operation. He who would flatter his country into false and vain security, must surely be ranked amongst her most dangerous enemies; her sincerest friends, whilst they love, respect and revere what is truly virtuous and honorable, will ever be the first to administer salutary counsel and reprehension, when they perceive her truest interests to be at stake, and her virtues in danger of decay. If the pure current of religion and piety cease to yield life and health to our souls, every attempt to provide for the security of our persons will be alike vain and ineffectual.

To our high and holy religion we must ultimately look for preservation; upheld by our "God and Saviour," we "shall *dwell safely and be quiet from fear of evil."

* Prov. i. 33.

May conviction of our sins awaken us to a repentance, which shall manifest its sincerity by the speedy reformation of our lives: so may we be distinguished in the sight of angels and men, as a peculiar *people, "purified unto the Lord, and zealous "of good works". It is thus, that *Christian* patriotism dictates the means of our deliverance, and amidst the most ardent struggles for the liberties of her country, she cannot but weep for the iniquities of the land, whilst she "prays for the †peace of Je-"rusalem".

7 AP 66

* 2 Tit. ii. 14. † Psal. cxxii. 6.

CORRIGENDA.

Page 29, line 7, *read* ingenuously
—— line 8, *for* period at God, *read* comma
Page 32, second line of notes, *dele* s, after 5